



Message from the City Manager

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Message from the City Manager to the Local Business Community Regarding COVID-19

Whitewater, Wis. July 10, 2020- Yesterday, the University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents voted unanimously to make face masks mandatory inside all University of Wisconsin campus buildings. Two days ago, UW-Whitewater Chancellor Dwight Watson released a statement to the Warhawk community highlighting the University's focus on health and safety as both the Whitewater and Rock County campuses prepare for students to return to campus for Fall Term 2020. These two actions underscore the importance of individual and collective caution as we continue moving forward in the COVID-19 era.

The City of Whitewater supports the efforts of System officials planning for the safe return of students in the fall. It is critical to Whitewater's economy that students return. For many local businesses, the absence of a fall semester would mean certain death, especially for Whitewater's hospitality industry. However, the University's success in keeping students in Whitewater may greatly depend on how well our local business establishments observe health and safety guidelines related to COVID-19.

The City anticipates the COVID-19 pandemic will continue for months to come. Walworth and Jefferson Counties continue to report increased positive cases of COVID-19. The virus activity level within Walworth County has been consistently high for the past two weeks, as reported by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. Whitewater alone has already had over 50 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and that number is expected to rise. In this environment, the need for business cooperation in observing social distancing and other safety precautions cannot be overstated.

Last week, city staff were made aware of an emailed complaint from a person who had dined in two of our local restaurants. The individual was upset that in neither of the restaurants were the waitpersons wearing masks, and there also was not the minimum 6' between occupied tables that is recommended. This is particularly concerning as most infectious disease experts say dining in a restaurant and spending time in a bar are among the riskiest activities for COVID-19 transmission.

In the email, this person thought that the city should impose regulations that would ensure that these best practices are followed. No regulations have been imposed as yet, but if COVID-19 confirmed cases increase significantly, or if community members do not take recommended health practices seriously, such an action may be considered.

The challenge and cost of this pandemic for local businesses cannot be overstated. Many in our community may never be able to fully appreciate the difficulties experienced by local business owners in these trying times. However, outbreaks within the local business community or a reduced student presence in the fall due to health risks would only make things worse.

At this time, I am asking for an enhanced level of cooperation from businesses currently operating in a manner out of sync with current health guidelines. I am further asking for the continued cooperation of those businesses that have diligently observed published health and safety guidelines in an effort to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Specifically, I am asking that business owners/operators take (or continue to take) the following actions:

1. Post signs at business entrances encouraging or requiring observance of recommended health practices including physical distancing and the use of facemasks.
2. Require each customer attendant, cashier, or server to wear a mask unless they have a legitimate medical excuse.
3. Limit capacity within business establishments in accordance with public health recommendations and ensure that there is at least 6' of distance between individual customers (dining parties in the case of a restaurant). Note: On July 2, Walworth County indicated that enough progress had been made to move to Phase 2 of their phased guidance for reopening which specifies a limit of 75% capacity.
4. For restaurants, encourage carryout dining in addition to the previously mentioned actions. Downtown restaurants could also encourage the use of the new picnic area on S. 1st Street.
5. For bars and taverns, remove enough stools and tables to ensure 6' of distance between patrons and encourage standing patrons to maintain distance.

I extend my gratitude and appreciation for the continued cooperation of the business community in these efforts to minimize the potential for virus transmission in the community.

Sincerely,

Cameron Clapper
City Manager